

CABLE TV = WHY IS THE CHURCH SO INTERESTED?

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VERY FEW of us look like stars on television, but we all share a thrill when we see ourselves on the tube. I was no exception as I sat in the Nebraska Center for Continuing Education watching myself interview some Nebraska Wesleyan University students about their attitudes toward dormitory and dating policies on the campus.

The interview was being fed to a perfectly ordinary television set by a tape recorder. A United Methodist minister, the Rev. Earl H. Reed of Loup City, Nebr., and I had made the tape as an assignment during a short course on cable TV.

We filmed our interviews with a portable video-tape recorder that consisted of a television camera small enough to hold in your hands and a battery-powered recording unit zipped into a case with a shoulder strap so it could be carried over the shoulder.

Portable? Well, yes, but preferably portable by two people. Each of us interviewed, and each of us taped, and if the results weren't professional quality, they convinced us that this was something we could do successfully with a little practice. A group of students accompanied by Phyllis Johnson of New York University's Alternate Media Center, who was there to teach us how to use equipment, did tape an appealing sequence that showed children from a day-care center in Lincoln's Epworth United Methodist Church as they played in a nearby park.

The 43 short-course students came from ten states and represented a cross section of the church. Some had had practical experience with cable TV or television production. Others, like me, had had none. Our "faculty" included people with solid background in television from the United Methodist Communications



The Rev. Earl H. Reed is at the camera as the Rev. Julius E. Early from Amarillo, Texas (left), and the Rev. Bill Richards from United Methodist Communications simulate a "talk" show.

staff (formerly TRAFCO), the National Council of Churches' Broadcasting and Film Commission (BFC), the Alternate Media Center, the Christian Church, and the United Church of Christ.

The short course on the University of Nebraska campus at Lincoln was one of a series of regional workshops on cable TV the church is holding across the country. It was sponsored by United Methodism's South Central Jurisdiction in cooperation with the church's Joint Committee on Communications, Nebraska Conference Communications, and the BFC.

Why should the church be so interested in cable TV? For that matter, what is cable TV?

CATV, or Community Antenna Television, began a little over 20 years ago when the first master antennas were installed on mountaintops to feed hard-to-get TV signals to subscribers' sets in the valleys be-

low. The feeding was done via interference-free coaxial cable, and it brought excellent pictures and sound to the sets of subscribers who paid installation and monthly service fees. It had nothing to do with the origination of programs; it was purely a commercial venture, but it brought television to a widening number of communities.

For a long time bringing pictures to sets in poor reception areas was all that CATV did do. But one coaxial cable can carry from 12 to 20 channels, and either through one cable or several connected cables it offers a practically unlimited potential.

Cable TV can bring us local news and information in greater detail than we get from over-the-air broadcasts. It gives political candidates a way to reach the public at costs they and their parties can afford.

A community organization can hold a meeting without people ever